

HABS
NJ,
11-TRET
10-

Trenton Municipal Building (Trenton City Hall
& City Hall Annex)
319 East State Street
Trenton
Mercer County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-279

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

AMERICA'S CITY HALLS

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY

HABS No. NJ-279

HABS
NJ
11-TRE
10-

NAME:

Trenton Municipal Building
Trenton City Hall & City Hall Annex

LOCATION:

319 East State Street

Trenton City Hall & City Hall Annex
occupy the block bounded by East State Street,
East Front Street, South Stockton Street
and Canal Street.

Mercer County

PRESENT OWNER:

City of Trenton

PRESENT OCCUPANT & USE:

Mayor's Office, City Council Chambers and
Administrative Offices of the City of Trenton.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Trenton Municipal Building, designed by Philadelphia architect Spencer Roberts in 1907, is a fine example of a civic architecture that captures the exuberance and monumentality of Beaux Arts Classicism combining and synthesizing it with the calm of Renaissance architecture.

PART 1 HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Trenton City Hall was designed in 1907. The original working drawings as well as other related documents bear this date. The City Hall Annex, designed sixty nine years later adjoins the original building.

mural done in 1911

2. Signed plans as well as contemporary newspaper accounts confirm Spencer Roberts as the building's architect. This classically trained Philadelphia architect's other local works include the Trenton Free Public Library.

The Annex's architects were the City of Trenton, John P. Clarke, A.I.A., A.I.P.; Fred Travisano, A.I.A.; Richard Bartels, A.I.A.: in Association with Franklyn B. Spiezle, A.I.A. Associates, P.A. Other buildings designed by the Annex Architects are the Henry J. Austin Health Center, (J. Clarke, F. Travisano, R. Bartels); and the Calhoun Street Firehouse (J. Clarke, F. Travisano, D. Kelbaugh) both designed as part of a planned community in center City Trenton which received national attention through a Progressive Architecture Design Award. The design team also was responsible for the restoration and adaptive reuse of a c. 1842 John Notman designed Italianate Villa for use as the Trenton City Museum (J. Clarke, F. Travisano, D. Abramson, D. Vieyra). They also undertook the adaptive reuse of a small Gothic Revival Church in Downtown Trenton to a Community Theatre, (J. Clarke, F. Travisano, J. Greenberg, R. Roberts, J. McQuilken, D. Vieyra, J. Di Domenico). Other projects include the Ike Williams Community Center (J. Clarke, F. Travisano, D. Kelbaugh), and the Cooper Field Bathhouse (J. Clarke, F. Travisano, J. Di Domenico, L. Weintraub).

3. All contract documents for the construction of City Hall and the City Hall Annex are on file in the Office of the City Clerk.
4. The Trenton City Hall is a sprawling majestic rectilinear three story marble edifice. Its main facade features a central section consisting of an entry portico and a loggia defined by twelve colossal Roman Doric columns. This central composition is flanked by symmetrical three bay end wings. Resting on a podium, the building is further set apart from the streetscape by an extensive set back. Full construction documents, including original working drawings, are on file in the office of the City Clerk.

5. The City Hall Annex, connected to City Hall by a glass enclosed atrium is also an elegant three story marble sheathed building. Echoing the rectangular form of the original building, the Annex is punctuated by strip windows with operable sections, corresponding in height to those of City Hall. The Annex's south facade features a brise-soleil which in a modern idiom, reflects the theme of City Hall's loggia system. This sun screen reduces the cooling load in summer and allows sunlight into the building in the winter to reduce the heating load.

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The move to construct a new City Hall began at the turn of the century. Until then City Government had been headquartered in a small French Second Empire Structure in the downtown section. The movement gained momentum when business leader Ferdinand W. Roebling, head of John A. Roebling's Sons Company and General C. Edward Murray, a respected political leader, became actively involved in the project with the forming of the City Hall Building Commission. Ground was broken in November, 1908, and the white marble cornerstone was laid June 18, 1909. The building opened for official use in 1910.

PART II - ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. Description of Exterior:

Trenton City Hall measures approximately one hundred by two hundred thirty feet. The exterior of the building, with the exception of the rear facade is faced with pure white Grade A Vermont Marble.

The exterior is divided into three horizontal sections throughout; there is a heavily rusticated base; a two-story central section; and a cornice with super-imposed, closed attic balustrade. The northern or East State Street, facade is divided into three vertical divisions; the central section consisting of the main entrance portico with a twelve-bay-long loggia above, and two, three-bay-wide end wings. The main entrance consists of a projecting portico, proceeded to by steps, which is pierced by three arches of equal size. Directly behind the three

arched openings are three small, mosaic-lined quoin vaults followed by revolving bronze doors. Handsome bronze gates flank these arched doors and are closed at night. Directly above the portico is a loggia which is ornamented with twelve Roman Doric columns which are connected by a balustrade. The window treatment changes from floor to floor as one progresses up the facade of the three-bay-wide end wings. The windows on the first floor are embellished with Gibbs Surrounds. Those on the second floor have projecting lintels and sills supported by modified scrolls, and those on the third floor have eared architraves with patera flanked by swags in their centers.

The east and west facades are three-bays-wide and have projecting central sections which correspond to the treatment of the central section of the East State Street facade. On the first story they have single arched doorways flanked by bronze gates leading to revolving doors. On the second and third they have a projecting central portion that consists of paired three-quarter Roman Doric columns flanking an ornamental panel.

The end wings of the rear or southern facade of the building are faced in marble and are identical to those on the front facade. In contrast the central portions are covered with tan face-brick. In its entirety the facade is divided into five three-bay-wide sections, the first, third and fifth of which project out. Moulded, white marble bands separate the floors in the central brick section. All the openings have flat lintels with the exception of those in the central section which have round-arched lintels.

The volume of the City Hall Annex is essentially the same as that of City Hall. Sited to the south of the original structure, the corners of the north side of the Annex cut at a 45° angle to reduce the mass of the building while allowing the existing City Hall volume to maintain its dominance. The Annex is sheathed in marble. Strip windows, which relate to the fenestration of the original structure wrap around three elevations. The south elevation features a 4'.0" deep brise-soliel.

B. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR:

On the first floor of the interior features a large central hallway and long corridors to the east and west terminated by secondary entrances. Generally, the same plan exists on the second and third stories as well; however, the square central hallway is positioned slightly to the south of the one on the first story to provide room for the Mayor's Suite on the second story and offices on the third story along the northern side of the building. According to a contemporary description, the first floor main hall;

"is finished in limestone and the corridors are wainscoted to a height of 6' with white marble. The Council Chamber and the Mayor's Suite are finished in oak, stained a dark color and rubbed to a wax finish. Wherever the finish is white marble, close-grained walnut is used in connection with it; and wherever the wall finish is plaster, oak is used....the flooring of all the main hallways is white marble".

At the eastern end of the second story is a two-story Council Chamber. It has gilt ornamentation on the ceiling, and to a lesser extend on the walls, and marble pilasters with gilded Corinthian capitals flanking the openings. On the wall behind the podium there is a large mural by Everett Shinn, one of the five original "Ashcan School" painters. The scene on the left illustrates wire drawing, whereas the one on the right illustrates pottery making. Before painting this mural, Everett Shinn, true to his belief in realism, spent six months alternating between the Roebling Steel Mills and the Thomas Maddock Pottery in Trenton. Consequently, he managed to capture the spirit of the two working environments and the dignity of the workers performing their jobs. To quote a contemporary article, the mural;

"show an inferno of heat, of vibrant lights, and darks, of dancing shows. The whole is a riotous harmony played by quick active muscles and fast moving wheels, still one moment, tense or relaxed the next".

The building's elegant richness and the industrial vitality depicted in these murals are a tribute to the prosperity that belonged to Trenton in the early part of the twentieth century.

The Annex is designed to accomodate an open plan office landscape lay out. This allows for the constant change required for the operation of a responsive municipal government. All the floors in the Annex align with those in City Hall permitting interrelated operations to be located on the same level. A new service core is located between the two office volumes to replace the outmoded elevators in City Hall. A central gallery space for exhibit is provided on the main floor.

C. SITE

Trenton City Hall and City Hall Annex occupy a full City block. City Hall faces a major commercial Street, while the Annex faces East Front Street, the opposite direction overlooking Trenton's industrial corridor.

PART III - SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

A. ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS:

Architectural drawings dated September 20, 1907, are located in the Office of the City Clerk, City Hall, Trenton, New Jersey.

B. EARLY VIEWS:

Early views include exterior photographs as well as pictures of City Council Chambers.

These photographs are filed under Public Buildings Photographs, in the Trentoniana Collection at the Free Public Library, Trenton, New Jersey.

1. Daily State Gazette - "Common Council's New Chamber is about completed"
April 5, 1911, Volume 59, No. 81, p. 9.
2. Men who have served Trenton as Mayor,
18" x 26" black and white poster including
photograph of "Present Municipal Building",
1915. File in Office of the City Clerk.

3. Photographs (Pre-construction through the present) filed under Public Buildings Trentoniana Collection, Free Public Library, Trenton, New Jersey.
4. View of Main Entrance Frontispiece - A History of Trenton, the Trenton Historical Society, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1929.
5. Water Color Painting by G.A. Bradshaw 1964, located in Mayor's Office, Trenton New Jersey.

C. BIBLIOGRAPHY:

City Tax Maps - Page 3, Lot 129.

Deeds - Filed in Office of the City Clerk.
Recorded in County Clerk's Office,
Book 298, Page 195; Book 300,
Page 69 oc; Book 308, Page 354.

Council Minutes - Filed in Office of City Clerk,
Trenton City Hall, Trenton, New Jersey.

Daily State Gazette, "Local Labor for New City Hall", March 20, 1907, Volume 55, No. 59, Page 1.

Sunday Times Advertiser, "A Perspective View of Trenton' New City Hall", June 23, 1907, Volume 24, No. 25, Page 1.

Daily State Gazette, "Common Council's New Chamber is About Completed", April 5, 1911, Volume 59, No. 81, Page 9.

New York Times, "Spencer Roberts", April 28, 1958, Volume 107, Nos. 36, 619, Page 23.

The New Jersey State Museum, Everett Shinn - 1873 - 1953, The New Jersey State Museum, An Exhibition Catolog, 1973, produced in cooperation with Delaware Art Museum and the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute.

Prepared By:

Daniel Vieyra
Preservation Architect

Rebecca Mitchell, Director
Bureau of Neighborhood Planning

City of Trenton
August 18, 1981